

**Press Release -**

**NATIVE AMERICANS TO CELEBRATE SAVING SUSQUEHANNOCK VILLAGE SITES**

Event: Native Lands Celebration

Date: October 17, 2009, (rain date, Sunday, October 18, 2009)

Time: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Location: Klines Run Park & Native Lands County Park, Long Level (Wrightsville) PA

Sponsor: Lancaster-York Native Heritage Advisory Council

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**NATIVE AMERICANS TO CELEBRATE SAVING SUSQUEHANNOCK VILLAGE SITES**

The public is invited to join local Native Americans on Saturday, October 17, 2009, (rain date, Sunday, October 18, 2009) as they express their gratitude to the residents of York County for saving the last Susquehannock Indian village sites. A traditional gift-giving ceremony will open the event at 10 a.m. on the overlook area of Kline's Run Park at Long Level, 3 miles south of Wrightsville, PA on Route 624 (Long Level Road).

The event celebrates the culmination of more than six years of efforts to preserve the site of the last village where the Susquehannock peoples functioned as a nation before they were dispersed into Maryland and New York in about 1680. Native American involvement began in December 2002 when development plans were submitted for part of Lauxmont Farms that contained the site. In October 2008, York County settled with the Kohr family to acquire the 187 acre property, and in April of 2009 the York County Commissioners designated 93 acres of the tract as Native Lands County Park.

The current County Commissioners as well as the former County Commissioners who had supported preserving the land that had been part of Lauxmont Farms have been invited to the opening ceremony. They are to be presented with gifts from representatives of the local Native American community.

According to Jerry Dietz (Seneca), spokesman for the Lancaster-York Native Heritage Advisory Council, "Our traditional blanket give-away to the Commissioners past and present is our way of saying "Thank You" symbolically to the groups, individuals, and residents of the York area involved in saving this particular site. The Commissioners are/were the elected representatives of the people of York County."

Present and past officials from Lower Windsor Township, where the park is located, as well as officials from other groups that have been involved in working for the preservation of the property, and members of the Tritt family, descendants of the Dritt family who's ancestral cemetery in the park was restored in a clean-up organized by the Native Heritage Council earlier this year, have also been invited to attend the opening ceremony. The Tritts plan to be at the cemetery site throughout the day to share their ancestors' story with park visitors.

From 11 a.m.- 3 p.m. the one mile walking trail across Native Lands County Park leading to the site of the last Susquehannock Village will be open for visitors to see and learn about the new park and the incredible history of the land and its peoples. Along the mowed trail that winds across the park's meadow will be artifact displays, Native American craft demonstrations and dancing, and other displays relating to the rich story of the land.

Archaeologists will explain the site, and Native people will share children's games and discuss life around the longhouse. Visitors will be able to walk a timeline of Man's long presence on the site, watch a flint knapper making arrowheads, see actual artifacts from the area, and visit the adjacent Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area's "Visions of the Susquehanna River" Art Collection at the John & Kathryn Zimmerman Center for Heritage at Historic Pleasant Garden, as well as enjoy views of the park's plants, birds, animals and the natural beauty of the area.

There will be no refreshments available, so the public is invited to bring their own picnic lunch and beverages and enjoy the parks' grounds and the beautiful views of the Susquehanna River. Hiking the

trail is strongly encouraged, but a shuttle bus will be available to the center of the park and the Zimmerman Center for those unable to walk the entire trail.

The event has been organized by the Lancaster-York Native Heritage Advisory Council with the assistance of York County Department of Parks and Recreation, Safe Harbor Water Power Corporation, the Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area as well many other groups and individuals.

**A Brief Native Lands County Park Timeline:**

14,000 years to present - People have utilized and have been caretakers of the Native Lands property.

1676 - 1680 - Native Lands was site of the last village where the Susquehannock Indians functioned as a Nation.

1984 - The Byrd Leibhart Site, site of the last village of the Susquehannock Indians, was deemed eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Some 200 documented burials exist in cemeteries associated with the village.

1990 - A National Parks Service Study recommended that the site be nominated for National Historic Landmark status.

December, 2002 - Plans were submitted for more than 450 homes and townhouses on the 187-acre parcel where the site of the last Susquehannock village is located.

February 26, 2003 - A hearing was held to address concerns about plans for the development. Nearly 250 members of the public attended, including many Native Americans who voiced their opposition to the plans. (By the time of the hearing, plans for townhouses on top of the village site had been eliminated.)

March 10, 2003 - The applicants indicated that 17 townhouse units still planned on the Susquehannock Village's northwest cemetery would be eliminated.

Summer, 2003 - The site was placed on Preservation Pennsylvania's Annual listing of the Commonwealth's Most Endangered Historic Properties "Pennsylvania at Risk, 2003".

2003 - 2008 - Hearings, condemnation, lawsuits, and negotiations, as well as sustained pressure from Native Americans and others concerned with the preservation of the endangered site ensued.

October 31, 2008 - The 187-acre parcel was acquired by York County for \$16.6 million dollars.

January, 14, 2009 - The Byrd Leibhart Site was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

January, 2009 - Nearby land containing the site of a previous Susquehannock Village (the Oscar Leibhart Site), already on the National Register of Historic Places, was purchased by the Farm & Natural Lands Trust of York County and the Archaeological Conservancy for preservation.

April 29, 2009 - York County designated 93 acres of its 187-acre parcel as Native Lands County Park, preserving site of the Last Susquehannock Village and surrounding the land for future generations.

October 17, 2009 - Native Lands Celebration - This event is a celebration and a giving of thanks by the Native American community in honor of the preservation of a special place (the Native American Heritage Sites), sacred grounds (the Native and non-Native cemeteries), and of a beautiful and significant piece of our Mother Earth for future generations to enjoy and learn from.

**Lancaster-York Native Heritage Advisory Council Mission Statement:**

*The Lancaster-York Native Heritage Advisory Council includes respected members of York and Lancaster counties' Native American community as well as non-Native participants with a deep interest in the Native American culture. The Council has been formed to ensure that the history and culture of the Native People of our area is preserved for future generations.*